

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ABOUT THE UDO AND NEW ZONING MAPS

- Q.** What is the Unified Development Ordinance?
- A.** The Unified Development Ordinance, referred to as a UDO, compiles all the County's land development ordinances into one user-friendly document. The UDO includes the zoning, subdivision, floodplain, sign, watershed protection and junk vehicle ordinances. The County's proposed UDO will apply to all new development outside of cities and towns, and their planning areas.
- Q.** Why did the County write a Unified Development Ordinance which has new development regulations?
- A.** The County's current zoning and subdivision regulations were written in 1988. New trends in development, such as electronic signs and cell towers, have occurred in the years since so new regulations were written to reflect these changes. Also, small area plans were developed, with input from citizens across the county, which reflected a desire for increased standards for development. This includes open space and sidewalks for new developments, more landscaping for commercial developments and the preservation of rural character for parts of the county.
- Q.** What are the small area plans?
- A.** The small area plans are a guide for growth and development of seven separate areas of the county outside the cities and towns. The plans were developed by citizen committees appointed for each of the seven areas, using input from property owners obtained at community meetings to determine how citizens in each community wanted the area to grow over the next 10-20 years. The plans included recommendations on land use, transportation, economic development and the environment.
- Q.** Why am I being rezoned?
- A.** All properties outside of the cities have been zoned since the County's original zoning ordinance was adopted in 1974. When a new zoning ordinance is adopted, it may include new names for the various zoning districts. The proposed UDO creates new names for the zoning districts which reflect the different densities (houses per acre) that are recommended in the seven small area plans. Along with the text of the UDO, a new zoning map is being considered for adoption which includes the new names for the zoning districts. Adoption of a new zoning map is legally considered to be a "rezoning" of property.
- Also included on the zoning maps are preliminary 100-year floodplain designations based on new flood studies completed by the North Carolina Division of Emergency Management and FEMA. The County is required to notify property owners about the preliminary flood maps and conduct a public hearing to obtain input on the maps.
- Q.** What will my new zoning be?
- A.** To find your specific zoning, you may look at zoning maps at any branch of the Catawba County Library system and the City of Hickory Patrick Beaver Memorial Library, or on the County's web site at www.catawbacountync.gov/depts/planning/udo. The "general district" designation is what your new zoning will be. If you are currently zoned residential, you will remain residential but the property will have a new residential zoning name. In addition to the general districts, you may also have overlay zones which include additional standards, such as where manufactured homes are allowed or commercial standards on major roads. The new floodplain designations are also shown as an overlay zone on the zoning maps.
- Q.** What do the zoning districts R-20, R-30, R-40, and R-80 mean?

- A. These are residential districts which allow homes built to North Carolina building code (stick-built and modular homes). Churches and schools also are allowed in residential districts. The number following the “R” means the lot size required when property is subdivided either as a large development or lots for family members. For example, R-80 means 80,000 square feet (or approximately 2 acres) must be provided for any new lot being created.
- Q. Can I still use my lot if it’s smaller than the zoning district designation (ex. an existing 20,000 square foot lot in a R-30 zoning area)?
- A. Yes, a zoning permit will be issued for any lot which is nonconforming due to its size; however, all zoning setbacks must be met.
- Q. Where will manufactured homes (single-wides and doublewides) be allowed?
- A. New permits for doublewide manufactured homes are allowed in the “Doublewide Manufactured Home Overlay” districts. New permits for singlewide manufactured homes with shingle/pitched roofs and vinyl siding will only be allowed in existing manufactured home parks. There are approximately 28 existing manufactured home parks in the county with over 630 lots. Existing single-wide manufactured homes may be switched out with a single-wide home in any case, as can double-wide manufactured homes. Permits for metal-on-metal manufactured homes will no longer be issued in the county.
- Q. Is the new zoning going to affect my property value?
- A. You will not see a direct change in the value of your property from the new zoning. Property values are based on real estate market sales of an area so, over time, the value of property could be adjusted if sales indicate a change in the value of the area. This then could reflect a change in your property value.
- Q. What are some of the new development standards being proposed?
- A. New businesses would be required to install landscaping islands in parking lots; limit sign height and size based on the type of road the development fronts; and provide a variety of landscaping around the business to buffer from adjoining homes and shield lighting away from roads and homes. New subdivisions must provide open space, which includes trails and/or sidewalks; and limit the number of driveways along the State road.
- Q. What is being proposed in the ordinance to help rural businesses in the county?
- A. A new type of business category, called “cottage business,” is being proposed which allows certain types of businesses in rural areas of the county. Cottage businesses allow uses such as skilled trades (plumber, electricians, etc.) travel agencies, professional services (accountants, surveyors, etc.) cabinet shops and small commercial uses with the majority of sales conducted off-site. A cottage business can be approved based on specific standards, such as a requirement that the owner live where the business is being approved or on adjoining property; that a lot must be at least $\frac{3}{4}$ acre in size, and that no more than 2 employees may help with the business. The County would approve a cottage business as a special use.
- Q. What process will be used for approving the UDO and the new zoning maps?
- A. The Planning Board held its public hearing on August 7, 2006 and recommended the UDO to the Board of Commissioners with some minor changes. The Board of Commissioners held public hearings on August 21, 2006 and September 18, 2006 beginning at 7:00 p.m. at the 1924 Courthouse in downtown Newton. At these public hearings, citizens may speak to the Board about the new ordinance and zoning maps. At its September 18, 2006 meeting, the Board, after hearing from all persons wishing to comment that evening, voted unanimously to continue the public hearing to its meeting beginning at 7 pm on Monday, December 18, 2006 at the 1924 Courthouse in Newton and to hold at least three work sessions to receive more information on the issues citizens expressed concerns about, ask questions about those issues, and study them in-depth. Information on the dates and times for those work sessions.